

The PREVENTION CONNECTION

NEWSLETTER

The Importance of Public Policy in Protecting Montana's Youth

—Jennifer Haubenreiser

The serious negative consequences associated with youth alcohol abuse are some of the better articulated and researched public health problems in America. Those working in the field of substance abuse prevention well know the complexity of the issue, along with the complexity of effective prevention, which must include long-term, research-driven, comprehensive and collaborative strategies. This is a collective responsibility, involving all institutions and agencies, within schools and campuses and at community, state and national levels.

We also now know far more about youth brain development than ever before, as well as the ways in which youth drinking patterns differ from those of adults. Chiefly, we know the importance of public policy in codifying community standards and communicating cultural and social norms, thus ultimately shaping behaviors.

Several pieces of key research inform our work to reduce the harm associated with underage and high risk drinking among youth. The *U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* (2007) clearly defines the prevalence and risks associated with

youth drinking, along with the complexity of adolescent developmental patterns. For instance, youth tend to drink less frequently than adults, but when they do drink, they tend to consume more, engaging in what we often refer to as binge or heavy episodic drinking. These risky patterns combined with less proclivity toward rational problem solving put youth at particular risk. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's (NIAAA) report, *Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges* (2002) defines the misuse of alcohol as the top public health concern facing college administrators. Virtually all literature makes evident the need for public policy that is clear and consistently enforced, but policy, while necessary, is not sufficient in and of itself.

The Amethyst Initiative

One of the most compelling recent debates, raised by John McCardell, President Emeritus of Middlebury College, began in earnest in the summer of 2008, soon becoming known as the *Amethyst Initiative*. This debate has since garnered the support of more than 130 college presidents interested in reopening the public debate over the drinking age. The premise is that the 21 drinking age law (MLDA) is not only

not working, but has resulted in a culture of binge drinking. Proponents of the initiative feel that the law has created a prohibitionist culture, driving youth drinking to the shadows where the riskiest behaviors occur. The Amethyst Initiative does not specifically call to lower the drinking age, yet it does challenge existing law, claiming that promotion of responsibility is a viable alternative to reckless drunkenness.

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Who is providing the alcohol to underage drinkers? Most of the youth who are engaging in underage drinking are getting alcohol either from someone they know who is age 21 or older, someone they know who is under age 21, or at home, either with or without their parents' permission.

The Vicki Column

We set out to create an alcohol prevention toolkit with this issue of the Prevention Connection, and mechanisms for global, overarching environmental prevention came through loud and clear. There are excellent strategies throughout this issue that range from using media to create awareness and change community norms, to policy solutions, from compliance to changing the way a community thinks and responds to underage alcohol abuse. What I have learned, and what this issue describes, is why it is so important to have policy aligned with practice, to have community norms aligned with enforcement and to begin to create a "we're all on the same page" environment when it comes to underage drinking, binge drinking and drinking and driving.

Unfortunately, we are not all on the same page. As Jennifer Habenreiser says in her Amethyst Initiative article, it's important to remember and believe that all of us working with prevention are doing our best to further strong, protective environments for children. That can (and should) mean examining our own attitudes. As long as we continue to believe that drinking is something kids will do no matter what, we'll continue to see conflicting policies, laws that work in the best interest of profit rather than families, and uneven enforcement. As a parent, and as a professional with a vested interest in prevention, I know that kids will do as we do, rather than as we say. One of the ways we can guarantee failure in our prevention efforts is to continue turning a blind eye to our kids' alcohol abuse. Tacit approval is still approval, and it is demonstrated in countless ways . . .

- House Bill #234 would have broadened the authorization of wine and beer tasting events on the premises of grocery and drugstores licensed for off-premises consumption.
- House Bill #297 would have authorized the on-premises sale of fortified wine (which includes more than 16 percent but not more than 24 percent alcohol by volume) under a beer and wine license.
- House Bill #352 would have allowed agency liquor stores to be located adjacent to grocery stores.

- House Bill #400 raises the level of alcohol in beer and other malt beverages from 7% by weight to 8.75% by volume.
- House Bill #412 reduces the liquor excise tax rate for companies that produce less than 200,000 proof gallons of liquor incrementally, to as little as 3% for those producing less than 20,000 gallons, to 13.8% for those producing between 50,001 and 200,000 proof gallons.
- House Bill #656 would increase the volume sales amount for determining agency liquor sales commissions to account for inflation.

These bills enhance access, increase alcohol levels, reduce prices and improve profit for those selling alcohol. If we, as a community, are serious about prevention, this is not the way to go about it. This does not present a common message. There is no common theme. As a mother, I know that mixed messages do not work. Telling a child in one breath that drinking is not okay, and in the next, asking her to bring you a beer is a mixed message. At a global level it is the same thing. It is not okay to create policies, then refuse to enforce them. It doesn't work to express support for prevention, then reduce penalties for sales to underage buyers, improve profits for liquor sales and allow marketers to put high-alcohol content "energy drinks" next to the Gatorade.

Prevention works, but it is going to take a consistent messaging that is consistently delivered through policy, law, and community norms. If we are to achieve what we say we want—reducing underage drinking as well as drinking and driving—it will be because we have come to terms with ourselves and with one another and can deliver a clear message articulated every way we know how . . . through policy, law, community norms, media literacy, enforcement, what we say to ourselves and what we model for our children.

Vicki

The Importance of Policy

Continued from cover

While data indicates an ongoing and high prevalence of underage drinking, it is important for those of us in the prevention field to review (and be able to articulate) the large amount of research that supports the “21 Law.” Perhaps most compelling is the substantive list of federal and public agencies that continue to support it, including the American Medical Association, National Transportation Safety Board, the U.S. Surgeon General’s Office, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, among others.

A number of flaws exist in the reasoning used by the proponents of the Amethyst Initiative, some of which were articulated recently by two national experts in college substance abuse prevention, Dr. Tom Workman from the University of Houston and Linda Major from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. They challenge the claim that the 21 Law has created the problem, saying:

- No one law can resolve the problem, and the 21 Law cannot work as long as mixed messages persist from parents, school administrators and the media. Moreover, effective prevention must be comprehensive, combining individual (education) and environmental (policy) strategies, including policy that limits marketing and access to alcohol.
- The assumption that the current law is creating a culture of binge drinking is not supported by data. The most significant research on college drinking does point to a culture of drinking, but the 21 Law has not been found to be the basis. Factors that can be influenced by campus decision makers have been identified, including failure to communicate policy and establish appropriate expectations, inconsistent enforcement, promotion of alcohol in association with college sponsored events, the availability of alcohol outlets on or around campus and the lack of adequate social and recreational alternatives for students.

Developmental features of the adolescent brain also negate the premise that lowering the drinking age will reduce the problem. Given their high impulsivity and propensity for risk-taking, youth are uniquely suited to enter risky situations, such as combat. However, when it comes to rational decision-making, youth are less able to make safe decisions, including setting limits on their alcohol intake and choosing not to drive after drinking.

The debate over the 21 Law is complex and gaining public interest, which is evident in recent media attention. Prevention specialists should understand all points of the debate, and realize that both sides are trying to work in the best interest of the health and safety of young people. Still, there is no consensus, even in Montana: Dr. George Dennison, President of University of Montana in Missoula has signed the Amethyst Initiative; Dr. Geoff Gamble, President of Montana State University in Bozeman, has not. It is also important to note that theory and data do not always drive decision-making. Alcohol policy is highly political, often influenced by ideological and political motives (not to mention personal opinion). Ultimately, we are obliged to utilize the best knowledge in our field, which I believe supports the 21 Law. It is possible that the evidence could change with continued data gathering, and the debate certainly provides us with the opportunity to educate those around us, including decision makers. Only with reasoned and inclusive dialogue can we make progress.

—Jennifer Haubenreiser is the Director of the MSU Health Promotion Project at Montana State University. She can be reached at 406-994-2337 or hoss@montana.edu.

The 21 Law

- Since inception of the 1984 drinking law prohibiting drinking until age 21, research suggests that approximately 900 lives a year are saved through the prevention of alcohol-related traffic fatalities (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2007).
- The Center for Disease Control has reviewed nearly 50 peer-reviewed studies of countries that changed the minimum drinking age. Their finds suggest that lowering the drinking age to 18 increased fatalities by 10 percent (MADD, Shults, et al., 2001).
- The developmental characteristics of youth make them particularly vulnerable to harm associated with alcohol. For instance, the areas of the brain associated with emotions and sensation-seeking mature before the areas that allow for increased judgment and impulse control do. (U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action, 2007).
- 40 percent of youth who begin drinking before the age of 15 show evidence of alcohol dependence at some point in their lives, a rate four times higher than those who waited to start drinking until after age 21 (U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action, 2007).
- The minimum legal drinking age law is one of the most studied alcohol control policies—most studies suggest that a higher legal drinking ages reduces alcohol consumption, even when the policy is not consistently enforced (Toomey & Wagenaar, 2002).

Notes from the Edge:

A Letter from a Concerned Parent

Just Ask Anna

Anna Whiting Sorrell is the Director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services. She has agreed to write a column for each issue of the Prevention Connection. What it will cover is up to you. Just let us know what is on your mind.

We have set up a link to a Survey Monkey tool (Just Ask Anna) on the www.DPHHS.gov website, or e-mail questions to the Editor of the Prevention Connection at DowningSL@bresnan.net. We'll choose one question to answer in each Just Ask Anna column in upcoming issues.

Editor's Note: In the Winter 2008 Juvenile Justice issue of the Prevention Connection, Apryl Lee was mistakenly listed as the author of the Montana Alliance for Families Touched by Incarceration (MAFTI). Marty Smith, Program Manager of the Parenting Place in Missoula, wrote the article. I extend my sincere apologies for any embarrassment or inconvenience this caused.

Sherri Downing

L

ike many parents of preteens, I have had arguments with my 12-year-old son after he accuses me of treating him like a baby and complains that he has no social life. Being an over-protective parent, I am afraid of what he will do when he is not at home, out at the movies or going to school dances. Recently, though, in talking with other parents and attending a parenting class, I realized that I need to give my son some breathing room. Over the last several months, he has been able to go to the movies alone with his little brother, attend a local dance and a couple of school events . . . without me. When he stays at his grandma's house, he is allowed to walk the three or four blocks, across busy streets, to a local market to get a candy bar or soda.

On one of those recent privileged trips to that local market, my 12-year-old son purchased a Synergy Kombucha Tea, which made him sick for several hours. Unbeknown to me, Synergy Kombucha Tea contained 0.5 percent alcohol, which is why it made my son ill. I did some research of my own on the internet and went to the local market myself. What I learned is that the law in Montana states that "anything under 0.5% of alcohol is legal to sell to anyone."

These drinks are available at most of the health food stores, convenience stores and grocery stores I've been to in Montana. Some people I have spoken with argue that the "health effects far outweigh the detrimental effects of the alcohol." How can that be possible, I wonder. This is my 12-year-old child that we're talking about.

I have heard about these types of drinks on the news and honestly had not given them much thought until now. Did you know that Sharps and O'Doul's, the supposed nonalcoholic beers, do have alcohol content under 0.5 percent? My child could go into your local grocery store and purchase either of these products.

Every day we hear reports of children dying from alcohol and drug abuse, so why is it OK to promote alcohol *in any form* to children? I think that we as parents need to educate our children and our community on not only the adverse effects of alcohol but the additional adverse effects that occur when it is combined with caffeine. Going from an extreme high to an extreme low is extremely dangerous. I have always told my children that they are not allowed to have energy drinks. We have had some pretty intense talks about alcohol and its effects.

Companies are marketing alcoholic energy drinks to children. Who is to say that won't open the door to other experiments with alcohol and then drugs? Isn't allowing this the same as telling our children that it is okay to drink, especially if there are healthy components included? Vodka and orange juice are a good example . . . get your daily intake of Vitamin C with a kick.

I don't see how promoting these products does anything but damage the message that alcohol in any form under the legal age is, *and should be*, illegal. Why don't we have a Zero Tolerance Policy in the State of Montana? Wouldn't that take care of this? How am I supposed

to trust that my child is okay out there when I can't even trust that the items he is buying at the local grocery store are safe for him to purchase and consume at 12?

Editor's Note: Printed with permission. The Liquor Control Division of the Montana Department of Revenue, who received this letter from a concerned parent.

Why are these types of alcoholic tea and alcoholic energy drink products with the artsy appealing bottles and appealing flavors being marketed to children?

Parents: *Do you know what your kids are really drinking?*

—Lisa Scates

Do your kids like energy drinks? In the world of energy drinks there are alcoholic and non-alcoholic products. Do you know which ones your kids drink?

Alcoholic energy drinks present health risks. These drinks contain alcohol (a depressant) and caffeine (a stimulant), a dangerous mix. The caffeine masks the intoxicating effects of the alcohol and causes what is known as a “wide awake drunk.” Based on academic literature, scientific studies suggest energy drinks do not limit the effect of alcohol on impairment. People may have faster reaction times and report feeling less drunk, but the alcohol still impairs judgment. Since caffeine masks the intoxicating effects of the alcohol, this could lead to increased risk-taking behavior. Young people are therefore particularly vulnerable to increased problems from ingesting these products since they are already developmentally more likely to take risks than adults are.

A teen’s brain isn’t prepared to deal with alcohol. The brain areas that encourage impulsivity and risk-taking develop early in a teen, while areas that improve self-control and inhibit impulsive behavior don’t develop until the very late teens or early 20’s. The prefrontal area (responsible for good judgment, planning, decision making and impulse control) undergoes the most change during adolescence. Researchers found that adolescent drinking can cause severe changes in this area, which plays an important role in forming adult personality and behavior. Damage from alcohol at this developmental stage can be long-term and irreversible. (American Medical Association Fact Sheet 2003)

Some of the regulatory concerns regarding energy drinks include the following.

— *Advertising* targets youth by using youth-oriented media such as MySpace and Facebook. These are also less visible to adults and parents.

- Most times the alcoholic energy drinks cost less than those without alcohol.
- The *alcoholic content* by volume can be significantly greater than that of a normal beer—in some cases twice as much. These drinks can contain anywhere from 4 to 8.5 percent alcohol by volume. A typical beer contains between 4 and 6 percent alcohol by volume.
- There is a *blurred distinction* that makes it difficult to distinguish between alcoholic and non-alcoholic energy drinks.
- Alcoholic energy drinks are typically *located* next to the non-alcoholic energy drinks, so customers don’t necessarily know what they are buying.
- Alcoholic energy drinks *mask* the taste of alcohol with tasty flavors.

Alcoholic energy drinks are popular with underage drinkers because of their taste, effect and low prices. Take the time to learn how to distinguish the alcoholic energy drinks from the non-alcoholic ones, and to ensure that your teen is drinking the appropriate one. Energy drinks with alcohol will have the percent on the can. Look for “alc/vol” and this will display the alcohol content (e.g., 6.0% alc/vol) on the side or front of the can. And remember, teen alcohol use is *not* an inevitable rite of passage. Teens need parental help to stay alcohol free.

—Lisa Scates is an Education Specialist for the Department of Revenue Liquor Control Division. She can be reached at 406-444-4307 or LiScates@mt.gov

Senate Bill 438

Both houses of the Montana Legislature have approved a Bill that will limit sales of energy drinks containing alcohol. House lawmakers voted 54-44 in favor of a measure that would restrict sales of alcoholic energy drinks to liquor stores. The bill, introduced by Senator Carol Juneau, was signed into law by Governor Brian Schweitzer on March 25, 2009.

The measure effectively treats drinks containing stimulants like caffeine, taurine or ginseng and 0.5 percent alcohol or more as hard liquor for sales purposes.

A 2007 report by the Marin Institute, Alcohol, Energy Drinks, and Youth: A Dangerous Mix reported that teenagers and young adults are the core consumers, with about a third of 12- to 24-year-olds reporting regular consumption. Nonalcoholic energy drink producers promote youth consumption using grassroots level marketing, as opposed to traditional channels (such as television, radio, magazine, and outdoor advertising). Companies look for “one-on-one relationships” gained through events, extreme sports sponsorships, Internet interactions, text messaging, and communication among users on Internet sites such as MySpace and Facebook.

For more information, go to www.marininstitute.org/alcopops/resources/EnergyDrinkReport.pdf <http://www.marininstitute.org/alcopops/resources/EnergyDrinkReport.pdf>

Making a Difference

Research tells us that characteristics of key systems in students' lives, such as their schools, can make a difference in their choices regarding substance abuse and other dangerous behaviors. MBI training offers schools the attitudes, skills and systems to help decrease risk factors and enhance protective ones.

School Risk Factors

- Negative school climate
- School policies not defined or enforced
- Availability of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs
- Transitions between schools
 - Academic failure
- Labeling and identifying students as "high risk"
- Truancy and suspension

School Protective Factors

- School expresses high but reasonable expectations
- School encourages goal-setting, mastery and pro-social development
- Staff members view themselves as nourishing caretakers
- School provides leadership, decision-making opportunities and alcohol/drug-free alternative opportunities
- School fosters active involvement of students
- School trains teachers in social development and cooperative learning
- School involves parents

The MBI and Alcohol Prevention

Children deserve the opportunity to grow up in schools and communities that support them in making healthy choices. The *Montana Behavioral Initiative* (MBI) Blueprint calls for schools to develop and implement prevention, intervention and support strategies around the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Schools are asked to provide activities that strengthen and enhance the protective factors that reduce the risk of underage drinking. These strategies reflect best practice, and are based on the MBI Triangle, which breaks strategies into three categories: universal, targeted and individual.

Universal strategies refer to the preventive, proactive approaches taken for all students, and in a broader sense, for the whole community. MBI encourages school and community partnerships, and in the case of underage drinking, this partnership is critical. Research indicates that looking at community social norms and policy around underage drinking is key to effective prevention. Data from the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* and the *Montana Prevention Needs Assessment* indicate that many Montana youth do not believe the adults in their communities think underage alcohol use is wrong. Communities that value youth are making an attempt to change that perception by establishing consistent substance abuse policies and community efforts that involve awareness about the dangers of underage drinking.

Schools also need to address prevention at the universal level. In addition to the traditional health-related information on the effects of alcohol use, students need to learn about social and legal consequences. Alcohol prevention curricula address consequences through a wide range of topics, including alcohol-related violence, court appearances, career limitations, dropout, suicide rates and more. MBI schools are encouraged to have a comprehensive substance abuse curriculum in place, using best practice materials at all age levels.

Along with curriculum needs, schools need to consider their substance abuse policies and practices. *Are they clear? Consistently enforced? Are the consequences the same for all students?* MBI also helps educators become more aware of their roles. Teachers and other staff examine

their own practices by being asked questions like, "Do you ever pretend not to hear kids talk about parties or drug use?" or "Do you ever know or suspect a student is high/hung over and say, *Just put your head down on your desk*, to try to prevent class disruption?" MBI stresses the significance of positive student-teacher relationships and promotes the philosophy that for adolescents, there is no such thing as responsible use of an illegal substance.

Targeted Group Interventions are higher on the MBI Triangle, and target the 15 percent or so of students who are at risk. These are high efficiency, rapid response interventions and supports. MBI teaches staff members to be aware of the signs and symptoms of substance abuse. School counselors, nurses and administrators become resources for students who are concerned about these issues, whether their concerns revolve around use by friends, family members or themselves. Older youth can join clubs or organizations that promote healthy choices and become mentors for younger students. Consequences for student substance abuse include educational components . . . or *Insight* classes. Programs are offered through the school system as well as through the community.

Individual Interventions come at the tip of the MBI Triangle and are targeted to the five percent or so of students who are more involved with substance abuse and who require intensive, assessment-based, individualized interventions. At this level, some students participate in out-patient programs; others require residential treatment. Schools work with families, juvenile justice and community substance abuse counselors to offer support and to facilitate transitions back into the educational setting. Students who require this level of support are more likely to require intensive support with academic and behavioral issues as well.

If prevention efforts are to be successful, strategies must address intervention and support at all levels. Underage drinking is a significant and complex issue. There are no easy answers or quick fixes. There are, however, many pathways to best practices in prevention. The Montana Behavioral Initiative serves as a resource to assist Montana schools in their efforts—because we know that *prevention works!*

—For more information, go to www.opi.mt.gov/MBI/.

The State of Education 2009

—Editor's Note: In February, Denise Juneau, the new State Superintendent of Public Instruction, delivered her State of Education address to an audience that included educators, State Representatives, Senators, Board of Public Education members and others from throughout Montana. This article has been gratefully excerpted from her address.



Article X of Montana's Constitution opens with: "*It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person.*" This vision for our education system was created by everyday Montanans nearly four decades ago when they gathered . . . to rewrite our State Constitution. While our students must still learn to read, write and do arithmetic, they do so in a world that is very different from when those words were written.

Students today are members of a global society in a way few of us ever envisioned. They live in a world of iPods, YouTube videos about every topic imaginable, they are connected globally through social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, their primary mode of conversation is text messaging—and they hold all of that power in the palm of their hands—literally.

Our schools are preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist. We need to make sure those schools are equipped to serve students as they move toward a future we can only imagine. In today's global economy, employers require at least a high school diploma. Specialized skills are needed for entry level and advanced jobs.

Our policies must reflect our expectation that our students must graduate from high school to be economically successful. To make sure our students succeed in high school—and beyond—we have to engage in unprecedented collaborations. Some of the topics under discussion to accommodate this include dual enrollment, distance education, and reducing the high remediation rates of students graduating from our high schools. The highway that connects our systems must include frequent on-ramps so students can get re-engaged if they need to pull into a rest stop.

I recently saw a great example of effective high school reform. Billings has a technical high school called the Career Center, which draws over 800 students from three area high schools. Students can choose classes in different career pathways that run a gamut from hospitality and tourism to education and training. In the

architecture and construction pathway, students design and build a house every year, right down to painting and designing the interior. This year, the Career Center's house sold for \$250,000. Those students are staying in school, learning relevant skills from outstanding teachers and gaining credits toward graduation. The Office of Public Instruction will promote the *many* incredible programs Montana schools are implementing to provide real-life opportunities for students.

We must also pay attention to the early childhood end of the spectrum. When children participate in quality early childhood programs—like Head Start—they are more likely to succeed in school because they are ready for Kindergarten and the stages that follow.

I started my education career at a Head Start on the southside of Billings while my parents attended then-Eastern Montana College to become teachers. Head Start gave me a good start—I went on to graduate from Browning High School, Montana State University, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the University of Montana Law School.

Our Constitution states: "*Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state.*" When we analyze the data from multiple angles, we know that the majority of our students are doing well academically, but that the guarantee is not being met for every student. Achievement gaps do exist, primarily between our poor and non-poor students. We can do better.

Our Constitution also provides that "the state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indian and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity." This provision became known as *Indian Education For All*, and has become a widely respected program duplicated in many other states. Many teachers wondered how it was possible to integrate content about American Indians into their

classroom lessons. Since 2005, our office, working with teachers and tribal educators, has created over 220 classroom units and lessons spanning nearly every curriculum area. Now we have physics students measuring the elastic potential energy storage of hunting bows. Math students are learning how to use experimental and theoretical probabilities to make predictions by playing a variety of tribal guessing games.

At the end of the day, we are all responsible for the education of Montana's children and we all benefit from each child's success. Every child deserves a chance to succeed and a quality education is a part of that foundation for success. We have an obligation to keep the good of our children—all of our children—in our hearts.

For more information, visit www.opi.state.mt.us/.

93% of Montana's Kindergarten students are now enrolled in full-time programs, with more schools coming on board next year.

Hungry in Montana

Hungry in Montana 2008, a report by the Montana Food Bank Network, revealed that hunger and poverty manifested in various ways among the clients surveyed.

— In rural sites, there were a greater number of seniors living on Social Security or disability incomes. Many were resistant to applying for public food assistance and opted to manage on their own.

— Many clients in rural sites skipped meals at least once a week, but felt they could access emergency food or a soup kitchen as needed.

— Urban sites had a greater number of families with children, and many were participating in public food programs for adults and children.

— The 2008 study found 67 percent of clients visiting emergency food assistance sites living at or below the official poverty level with the highest number of clients in poverty on the reservation sites. Of those living in poverty, 21% were at 50% of the poverty level, also known as deep poverty.

For more information, visit the Montana Food Bank Network at <http://mfbn.org/>.

The Conundrum of Poverty and Hunger

—Minkie Medora

Economic and food security go hand-in-hand. Ask a middle-school child from a low-income family how s/he is doing and you may hear about parents being out of work, heat turned down, not enough money to put gas in the car and nothing to eat at home before school.

The Montana Food Bank Network, which provides emergency food to 200 agencies around the state, has the opportunity to meet with clients who come to the agencies. Our study of food bank clients has shown that hunger goes hand-in-hand with the many complex situations faced by people living on low incomes.

Economic hardship and other types of deprivation have serious effects, not just on those who endure privation, but on the whole community. This year, economic stress at the national level has created new challenges for Montanans living in poverty, including the newly poor.

In early 2008, we saw the sharpest increases in food prices in the last forty years. For Montana families falling below (or just above) the official poverty line, this increase in food prices, coupled with already high fuel costs, sent family expenses soaring. Though food bank clients demonstrated many innovative ways to stretch their food dollars, critical needs like rent, heating bills, medical bills and fuel costs have negatively impacted food budgets.

Increasing numbers of food bank clients have had to make hard choices between paying for food or paying for other needs. Clients overwhelmingly stated that they had been hit hardest by the sharp rise in food and fuel costs. In order to cope with inadequate access to food, adults skipped meals, visited food banks more frequently and purchased more affordable, but less nutritious, foods. Only about a third of clients had access to locally grown foods.

The challenges faced each day are constant and unrelenting. Despite efforts to

improve their lives and create self-sufficiency, family dynamics and structural barriers make it difficult for working parents, other adults and seniors to improve their economic, social and physical situations. Fear and apprehension add to the stress of getting through each day. As family budgets are stretched to meet existing expenses, there is greater fear of *unexpected* expenses for medical bills, house and car repairs. Fluctuating job security is another issue. These problems are exacerbated in

winter when fuel and heating costs increase.

Besides the obvious hardships of poverty and hunger, both impact health, social and mental well-being. Such impacts have been frequently studied and

the results show that: infants experience stunted growth, iron-deficiency anemia and reduced capacity for learning; children show cognitive symptoms like slower memory recall; hungry children are more likely to repeat classes and need special education; and youth living in poverty may have negative feelings about their parents' ability to meet family needs. This often leads youth to difficulties including school drop out, poor adult health and poor employment outcomes. Adults may struggle with obesity and diabetes and other chronic diseases, and seniors are at greater risk for malnutrition, leading to acute health problems requiring hospitalization. In all cases, depression and anxiety disorders occur at heightened levels.

Finding solutions to hunger and food insecurity requires improving economic self-sufficiency for all Montana families. People with limited incomes should not have to rely on charity as a routine method for accessing food. What does it say about us as a society when a grandmother skips refilling prescriptions to feed her grandchildren, or when parents have to hide food to make it through the month?

—Minkie Medora is Chair of the Food Policy Council of the Montana Food Bank Network. For more information about the Montana Food Bank Network, visit <http://mfbn.org/>.

In a recent study by the Montana Food Bank Network, more than 60% of the food pantry clients said they'd had to choose between paying for food or paying for rent, utilities, medicine or fuel.

Preventing FAS in Lewis and Clark County: *The Intensive Case Management Home Visiting Program*

—Dorothy Bradshaw

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral and/or learning disabilities with lifelong implications. The best-known diagnosis is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Signs include distinct facial features—a smooth philtrum (the groove between nose and upper lip), a thin upper lip and small eye openings—as well as growth deficiencies, and central nervous system (CNS) defects. Children may also have partial FAS, where some but not all of the symptoms are evident.

- Jean is a recovering alcoholic. Her daughter has been to the hospital 10 times for heart and kidney problems. At 2, she can't walk or talk.
- Katie is 5. She has no friends, throws tantrums, and can't read like other kids. Her teacher says she can't sit still or pay attention. Her birth mother drank on weekends.
- Dana is in substance abuse treatment. Her 13-year-old daughter has been suspended from school three times and has no friends. The school psychologist isn't sure what's wrong.

All of these children have such baffling problems that even a psychologist can be stumped. Since the birth mothers drank alcohol, the children might have various types of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). It isn't uncommon: each year, as many as 40,000 babies are born with an FASD. The cost to the nation for FAS alone is about \$6 billion a year.

In 2006, the Montana Public Health Home Visiting Program piloted the FASD Prevention Program. It was designed to evaluate the impact of additional support on the health measures of high-risk, pregnant women. Because of their circumstances (e.g., age, level of support, substance abuse patterns), participants represented women who were at highest risk for engaging in non-health promoting behaviors . . . behaviors, such as alcohol abuse, that can have profound adverse impacts for the mother and child. Lewis and Clark County Health Department's (LCCHD) Home Visiting program was one of six pilot sites.

The Home Visiting program is one of the core public health programs at the LCCHD. It provides home-visiting and case-management services to families that include pregnant women or young children. Families receive help with accessing services, health and parenting education; children are screened for developmental, emotional and behavioral benchmarks. The Lewis and Clark County FASD Prevention Program provides weekly home visits and support to the women who volunteer to participate. Women are seen throughout their pregnancies, and for the first four months after the baby is born.

A variety of factors and conditions are strongly related to engaging in health enhancing behaviors during a pregnancy. These include social support, family functioning, positive mental health status and

living in a non-abusive relationship. If these factors and conditions are optimized, the mother is more likely to avoid such dangerous behaviors as illicit substance abuse, alcohol consumption and

smoking. If an intervention can facilitate these changes, then the health/functioning of the mother and child can be favorably impacted.

"It's always so wonderful to visit the mom with her healthy newborn babe. These women work really hard to stay healthy during their pregnancies, and it is an honor to work with them. Quite a bond is formed, and sometimes it is hard to leave."

—Kim Rodgers, FASD home visitor.

The evaluation results of the FASD prevention program provide some of the first scientific data that demonstrate significant and meaningful changes associated with the intervention. For example, mothers who participated in the program over time reported an improved sense of social support, family functioning and mental health (depression). These findings were provided through validated measurement tools. Furthermore, the percentage of mothers experiencing physical abuse decreased from 25 to 19 percent during the evaluation period. Mothers also reported cessation or decreases in smoking (36 percent), drug use (23 percent) and alcohol use (34 percent) during the time they received home visiting services.

In short, high-risk women who receive the support of a home visitor are less likely to abuse alcohol—perhaps because so many of the risk factors that lead to alcohol abuse were improved. For obvious reasons, our hope at Lewis and Clark County Health Department is that this program will be continued, along with other home visiting services. After all, healthy babies make healthier communities for all of us.

—Dorothy Bradshaw is the Administrator of the LCCHD Community Health Promotion Division. She can be reached at 406-443-2584 or dbradshaw@co.lewis-clark.mt.us.

Risk Facts

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) summary of data for 2005-2006 reports that nationally:

- an estimated 11.8% of pregnant women between the ages of 15 and 44 reported having 2.4 drinks a day on the days they drank;
- 10% reported binge drinking (4 or more drinks on any one occasion) while pregnant; and
- 4% reported heavy drinking—having one or more drinks per day.

Just the Facts: *Prevention Needs Assessment and Montana Youth Risk Survey Data*

The Montana PNA

The Montana Prevention Needs Assessment Survey (PNA) has been administered to Montana's youth in grades 8, 10, and 12 in even numbered years since 1998. Comparisons of the results between years or to nationwide data are used to measure the need for prevention services among youth in terms of substance abuse, delinquency, antisocial behavior and violence. Survey questions ask youth about the factors that place them at risk for substance use and other problem or risk behaviors, along with protective factors that help prevent risk behaviors.

The survey is sponsored by the Montana Chemical Dependency Bureau, Addictive and Mental Disorders Division (AMDD), Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention under the Montana Substance Abuse, Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) block grant. A total of 17,588 students in grades 8, 10, and 12 participated in the 2008 PNA Survey, which equals a participation rate of 51.3 percent. Nearly equal numbers of males and females took the survey in all grades and the majority of respondents were White (80.8%). The next largest ethnic group being Native American (9.6%).

More information and data can be found online at <http://prevention.mt.gov/pna/>.

How easy is it to obtain alcohol? Percentage of Montana student respondents						
	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
Very hard	10.4	8.8	9.8	12.1	13.8	14.5
Sort of hard	13.1	12.1	11.8	13.4	14.4	14.8
Sort of easy	32.3	33.0	30.8	30.3	31.3	31.5
Very easy	44.3	46.1	47.6	44.2	40.5	39.1

In 1998, 44.3% of youth participants in the Montana Prevention Needs Assessment thought it was very easy to obtain alcohol. By 2008 the number had dropped to 39.1%. (MPNA)

Would police catch a kid drinking alcohol? Percentage of Montana student respondents						
	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
NO!	36.1	32.8	33.1	27.3	25.5	23.4
No	49.1	53.8	52.0	52.2	52.9	53.1
Yes	11.3	10.7	11.7	16.1	16.4	18.0
YES!	3.5	2.6	3.2	4.4	5.3	5.5

In 1998, 14.8 % believed they would be caught if they chose to drink alcohol. In 2008, 23.5% believed so. (MPNA)

Lifetime alcohol use frequency Percentage of Montana student respondents						
Frequency/Times	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
0	25.5	24.5	25.9	29.3	32.6	34.3
1-2	13.1	15.0	14.4	14.1	14.6	15.0
3-5	10.7	11.3	11.0	10.1	10.3	10.8
6-9	8.3	8.8	8.5	8.0	7.5	7.6
10-19	10.6	11.0	10.9	9.9	9.3	9.1
20-39	9.8	9.6	9.5	9.3	8.5	7.8
40+	22.0	19.8	19.7	19.4	17.2	15.3

How frequently have Montana youth used alcohol in their lifetimes? In 1998, only 25.5% had never used alcohol and 22% had used alcohol more than 40 times. In 2008, the number of youth who had never used alcohol was up to 34.3%, and the number of youth who had used alcohol more than 40 times had dropped to 15.3%. (MPNA)

How many times have you had 5 or more drinks in the last two weeks? Percentage of Montana student respondents						
Frequency/Times	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
0	70.6	69.5	70.8	69.3	75.2	76.5
1	9.5	10.4	9.7	10.3	9.0	8.9
2	7.3	7.2	7.7	7.9	6.2	5.8
3-5	7.4	7.9	6.9	7.9	5.9	5.6
6-9	2.3	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.7	1.5
10+	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.0	1.6

Binge drinking among Montana youth appears to be declining. In 1998, 29.3% of youth surveyed indicated they had consumed 5 or more drinks in the last two weeks at least once. In 2008, the number of youth who indicated binge drinking on at least one occasion had dropped to 23.4%. (MPNA)

Percentage of Montana student respondents How wrong do your parents feel it would be for you to drink alcohol regularly?						
	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
Very wrong	36.1	32.8	33.1	27.3	25.5	23.4
Wrong	49.1	53.8	52.0	52.2	52.9	53.1
A little bit wrong	11.3	10.7	11.7	16.1	16.4	18.0
Not wrong at all	3.5	2.6	3.2	4.4	5.3	5.5

Parental attitudes toward underage drinking as a rite of passage are critical. In 1998, 96.5% of youth surveyed thought that their parents felt it was wrong to some degree for youth to drink alcohol regularly. In 2008, the number had declined slightly to 95.7%. (MPNA)

My family has clear rules about alcohol and drug use. Percentage of Montana student respondents						
	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
NO!	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.2	2.6	2.8
No	15.9	15.1	14.8	13.5	12.6	12.4
Yes	31.5	35.7	36.0	37.2	36.3	38.2
YES!	48.7	45.6	45.4	46.2	48.6	46.7

The percentage of Montana youth surveyed who believe their families have clear rules about alcohol and drug use has increased slightly over the past decade. In 1998, 80.2% of youth surveyed felt that their families had clear rules about alcohol and drug use; by 2008, the number had increased to 84.9%. (MPNA)

How old were you when you had your first drink of alcohol other than a few sips? Percentage of Montana student respondents				
Frequency	2001	2003	2005	2007
Never had a drink other than a few sips	17.1	18.6	22.0	26.9
8 years old or younger	13.0	9.0	7.9	7.9
9 or 10 years old	8.3	7.5	7.1	6.3
11 or 12 years old	13.9	14.0	12.9	11.8
13 or 14 years old	28.3	28.6	27.1	25.5
15 or 16 years old	17.1	19.8	20.1	18.6
17 years or older	2.4	2.7	2.9	3.1

Age of onset is a critical factor in underage drinking. The percentage of youth who never had a drink of alcohol other than a few sips has increased by more than 50% since 2001. In 2001 only 17.1% of Montana youth participating in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) indicated that they had never had a drink other than a few sips. By 2007, the number increased to 26.9% of youth surveyed. (YRBS)

During the past 30 days, how many times did you ride in a car or other vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol? Percentage of Montana student respondents				
Frequency	2001	2003	2005	2007
0 times	60.7	63.1	65.6	67.1
1 time	12.0	11.6	11.9	11.3
2 or 3 times	14.7	13.7	12.9	13.3
4 or 5 times	4.4	4.7	3.9	3.4
6 or more times	8.3	6.8	5.6	4.8

Many risk behaviors are associated with underage drinking. Fewer Montana youth are choosing to get into a vehicle with someone who has been drinking. In 2001, 60.7% of youth surveyed indicated that they never ride with someone who has been drinking. By 2007, the number had increased to 67.1%. Conversely, the number of youth who have ridden six or more times with someone who has been drinking dropped from 8.3% to 4.8% between 2001 and 2007. (YRBS)

During the past 30 days, how many times did you ride in a car or other vehicle when you had been drinking alcohol? Percentage of Montana student respondents				
Frequency	2001	2003	2005	2007
0 times	78.2	79.6	81.5	84.0
1 time	9.0	7.8	8.2	7.2
2 or 3 times	7.3	7.0	5.6	5.7
4 or 5 times	2.3	2.3	2.0	1.1
6 or more times	3.2	3.3	2.7	1.9

Fewer Montana youth are choosing to drink and drive. In 2001, 3.2% of youth surveyed indicated that they drove a vehicle when they had been drinking. By 2007, the percentage dropped to 1.9%. (YRBS)

—Thank you to Julie Fischer of the Montana Board of Crime Control (MBCC) for compiling this useful report. For more information about the MBCC, go to www.mbcc.mt.gov.

The YRBS

The Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) assists educators and health professionals in determining the prevalence of health-risk behaviors as self-reported by Montana youth. In 1988, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initiated a process to identify the leading causes of mortality, morbidity and social problems among youth - these were identified and categorized into six risk areas: 1) behaviors that result in unintentional and intentional injuries; 2) tobacco use; 3) alcohol and drug abuse; 4) sexual behaviors that result in HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancies; 5) physical inactivity; and 6) dietary behaviors. The survey is conducted every other year in odd-numbered years.

The 2007 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was conducted in February 2007. The Montana YRBS results are based on a random sampling completed by 4,030 high school students. The results are representative of all students in grades 9-12 in Montana.

Go to www.opi.mt.gov/YRBS to access all six Montana YRBS reports, Montana regional data, trend data, Montana versus U.S. data, and school-specific data. Reports are available for high school, grades 7-8, Native American students on reservations, Native American students in urban schools, alternative school students, and students with disabilities.

Off and Running: *The Montana Community Change Project*

The Montana Community Change Project

Montana was awarded the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (SPF SIG) on July 1, 2005, along with four other states and territories. One of the goals of this federally funded project is to reduce binge drinking and drunk driving.

That effort, known as the Montana Community Change Project, uses an environmental prevention model. Within this model, program officers evaluate the environment and social norms of Montana's communities.

For more information on the Montana Community Change Project, go to www.mtccp.info.

"We were finding among our local students that there was the perception—valid or not—that local law enforcement wasn't aggressive enough on cracking down on underage drinking. In fact, less than 15 percent of students surveyed in the 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment said they worried about getting caught drinking by law enforcement. We knew this was one area we'd have to change to have an impact locally." —Maggie Anderson, Lincoln County Program Officer

A statewide effort to reduce binge drinking and drunk driving is gathering momentum. Program officers around the state are implementing real solutions using an environmental prevention approach.

The Montana Community Change Project (MTCCP) started in January 2008, in six regions around the state identified as having significant binge drinking and impaired driving problems among teens and adults. One region in northwestern Montana encompasses Lake, Lincoln, Sanders and Mineral counties as well as the Flathead Indian Reservation.

Five program officers have worked for more than a year to build support for MTCCP in this area. Much of 2008 was spent collecting data on DUI conviction rates, Minor-In-Possession (MIP) citations, local alcohol-related advertising, emergency room visits, vehicle crash rates, student survey information and numerous other kinds of data. The idea was to identify specific problem areas in each county and then focus on how to solve those problems using an environmental prevention approach. After months of data collection and talking to people throughout their communities, program officers began implementing evidence-based strategies.

In Lincoln County, program officer Maggie Anderson is focusing on building support for a more aggressive approach to issuing MIPs by working with her local city and county law enforcement agencies. During her data collection efforts last year, Anderson discovered several interesting facts related to underage drinking in Lincoln County.

— According to the 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) data, Lincoln County is ranked 5th in the state for high school binge drinking, yet only 32 MIPs were issued between July 2007 and June 2008. This is far fewer per capita citations than are issued in other regions around the state.

— Students who were caught and received MIP citations were only fined an average of \$20—a fraction of the fines levied for MIPs in other regions.

"We're really focusing on building support in the community for local law enforcement, to let our city police and sheriff's deputies know that we will support them in cracking down on underage drinking," Anderson said. "We want to send the message that underage drinking isn't acceptable, and we need law enforcement's help in reducing that."

Anderson is also working on building support for increased sales restrictions on alcohol at public events that typically feature heavy drinking, such as Libby's *Logger Days*, Eureka's *The Bull Thing* and Troy's Fourth of July celebration. Those restrictions might include location and time of beer sales and more training on public health and safety concerns for servers working at these events.

"Our community surveys indicate there's real support for these ideas, especially using wristbands (to indicate someone has been carded and approved to buy alcohol), limiting hours of sales, and establishing physical locations for alcohol consumption, like a beer garden," Anderson said. "It's all about building awareness and support for these ideas."

Building support for these ideas is a key aspect of implementing policies and methods that will help reduce underage drinking and limit over-consumption in the adult population. One effective tool is compliance checks, and that's the current focus in Sanders County.

In order to properly do a compliance check, an underage person must attempt to purchase alcohol in a bar or store using his or her real ID. This means that the local law enforcement agency needs to know how to complete the checks effectively within the spirit and intent of the law. The goal of compliance checks is to make sure businesses are checking IDs and turning away underage buyers, not writing citations.

To that end, the Sanders County Sheriff's office, in cooperation with the county attorney's office, hosted a training program in January that featured Flathead

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Off and Running: MTCCP

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County Sheriff's Deputy and Alcohol Enforcement Team Leader, Travis Bruyer. Bruyer heads Flathead County's anti-underage drinking team, and has provided numerous training classes to law enforcement agencies around the state on how to implement effective compliance checks.

"It was great to have Travis come in and provide this training. Our Sheriff's office, county attorney's office, and local police departments are all wanting to do what they can to reduce alcohol sales to underage people. Compliance checks are an important step in that process," Sanders County Program Officer Krista Standeford said. "With this training, we're all moving forward together to make that happen."

Like Anderson, Standeford has been spending time building support for her local law enforcement agencies as a key aspect of compliance check implementation. That also means addressing the concerns of the business community. As expected, many alcohol retailers are concerned about being cited for accidentally selling alcohol to a minor. They want training on how to spot fake IDs and information that will help them better understand compliance with state liquor laws.

Responsible Alcohol Sales and Service (RASS) training is a state-certified course—the *Let's Control It!* Curriculum—that shows bartenders, servers, store clerks and bar managers how to spot fake IDs, recognize tribal IDs and those from other states, how to understand state liquor laws and (in the case of bar and restaurant employees) reduce overconsumption. The curriculum provides trainees with lots of tips to help reduce the chance that someone will become too intoxicated. Some techniques include encouraging food consumption, providing non-alcoholic beverages as occasional alternatives and being aware of the signs someone has had too much to drink. The tool is being implemented in communities throughout the state and has specific objectives that show bartenders and store clerks that they can reduce alcohol-related problems in their communities.

"We had our first RASS training at the end of February, and we're seeing great support for it from not just the community but from establishment owners as well," Mineral County program officer Denyse Traeder said. "Once we had the chance to

tell people about the benefits of RASS training, we're finding that many in the retail community are receptive to the idea.

We had three bars sign up within two days of announcing the training."

Program officers in other counties have been spreading the word, too.

"We have one local grocery store chain that wants to have all their cashiers go through this RASS training. This retailer, which represents four grocery stores in Lake and Flathead counties, wants to do what it can to reduce underage alcohol consumption. Like most businesses, they don't want a reputation for selling to minors," said Flathead Reservation program officer Gary Acevedo. "And they're doing something about it."

Acevedo and Lake County Program Officer Ethan Smith have been working together for the past few months to build support for RASS training, and it's starting to pay off. In addition to grocery store employees, several bars signed up for the first class, held in March, and word about the benefits is spreading among bar managers.

RASS training, compliance checks, and improved MIP enforcement are just some of the initiatives MTCCP Program Officers are implementing in Montana. They are also building support for social host laws, which create penalties for adults who allow underage drinking to take place in their homes. They are identifying other policies and methods that can help reduce impaired driving and binge drinking. It's an ongoing effort that will continue well into 2011, with the idea that communities will take ownership of the problem and continue working to reduce binge drinking and drunk driving for many years to come.

—For more information on the Montana Community Change Project, go to www.mtccp.info. To contact with one of the program officers interviewed for this story, call Ivy McGowan at 883-7316.

"What we've found is that once one establishment goes through the training, they become the best source for telling others about the benefits of the training." Ethan Smith, Lake County Program Officer.

The goal of MTCCP is to implement policies and tools that reduce binge drinking and drunk driving in the community, while building community support for these efforts. The idea is to change social norms surrounding heavy alcohol use and abuse.

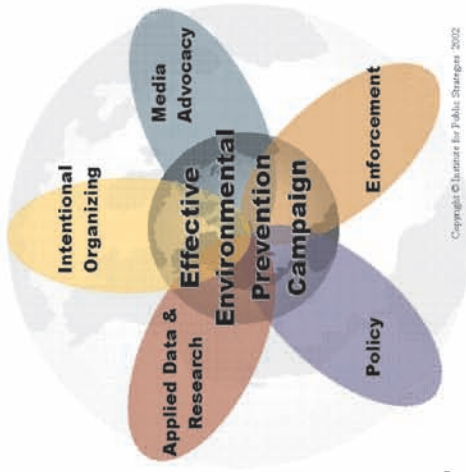
MTCCP participants look at:

- alcohol-related advertising and promotion;
- retail availability and accessibility to underage and adult drinkers;
- social availability at public events, private parties and in the home; and
- DUI and MIP arrest and conviction rates, and related fines and penalties; and
- overall law enforcement efforts to reduce alcohol-related problems.

For more information on the Montana Community Change Project, go to www.mtccp.info.



The MTCCP Team



Montana Community Change Projects create community conditions and behavioral expectations that make binge drinking and driving and driving less acceptable.

	Age Restrictions for Alcohol Sellers/Servers	Compliance checks at Alcohol Outlets	Court Watch	Create Cross-Jurisdictional Law Enforcement Unit	Dedicated Probation Officer	Deterrence Theory (increased enforcement, stronger penalties and swifter adjudication)	MIP Enforcement	MIP Adjudication	Party Patrols	Mandatory RBSS	Restrictions on Alcohol at Special Events	Safety Checkpoints	Social Host Laws	Social Host in Public Places	Student Behavior Contracts
Dawson County	X												X		X
Roosevelt County / Poplar		X											X		
Richland County		X				X					X		X		
Sheridan County						X							X		
Wibaux County						X							X		
Roosevelt / Wolf Point		X											X		
Jefferson County / Boulder		X				X			X						
Jefferson County / Whitehall		X													X
Blaine County		X							X				X		
Hill County		X											X		
Phillips County		X				X									
Flathead Reservation		X													
Lake County		X											X		
Lincoln County													X		
NWMTCCP – Mineral County		X											X		
NWMTCCP – Sanders County		X	X	X											
Blackfeet Reservation / Browning				X									X		
Blackfeet Reservation / Cut Bank & Seville				X									X		
Blackfeet Reservation / Heart Butte				X									X		
Beaverhead County						X									
Deer Lodge County													X		
Madison County			X			X							X		
Powell County			X												
Silver Bow County					X										

MONTANA COMMUNITY CHANGE PROJECT SITES/INITIATIVES

Initiating Environmental Prevention



The Montana Community Change Project (MTCCP) is an Environmental Prevention project funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, through the Department of Public Health and Human Services. The MTCCP began operating in 24 communities throughout Montana in January 2008. Its focus is preventing drinking and driving and binge drinking among adults and youth by identifying and addressing environmental factors contributing to (or maintaining) alcohol-related problems.

The project is designed to create community conditions and behavioral expectations that make drinking and driving and binge drinking less probable and less acceptable. Instead of using traditional strategies such as education and awareness, the MTCCP uses a proven combination of strategies that includes intentional community organizing, media advocacy, policy development, research and data, enforcement and evaluation to create widespread, sustainable changes in communities.

The project is based on the premise that drinking and driving, binge drinking and underage drinking are products of individual choices and contextual factors that strongly influence behavior. Therefore, they require a collective response focusing not only on individual behavior, but on community norms and standards.

Environmental Prevention is generally implemented in a community through a campaign. Campaigns involve a combination of five strategies: applied data and research, intentional organizing, media advocacy, policy and enforcement. These strategies can be used to address a wide range of public health and safety issues from an environmental perspective. To be successful, each of the five strategies must be used, although they may be applied differently to meet the unique needs of individual communities.

Applied Data and Research means using local data to identify needs and the problems to be addressed. Data and research then can be used to identify evidence-based solutions to these problems. Data collection also supports the need for community change and can demonstrate the change that occurs.

Intentional Organizing means bringing together key community members concerned with the problems and helping them mobilize to create change. This involves teaching community members about the issues at hand, sharing the best available data with them and providing guidance as they identify solutions that they think will work in their communities. Ultimately, intentional organizing is designed to unite and give a voice to community members who want to create positive change in their communities.

Policy Development honors that fact that policies create behavioral expectations; they make it easier to engage in healthy and safe behaviors and harder to engage in unhealthy and unsafe behaviors. This involves reviewing existing laws, practices and procedures related to the problem that could be improved or added in order to discourage and reduce the impact of the problem.

Policies Designed to Reduce Alcohol-Related Problems include:

- Alcohol outlet density restrictions;
- Mandatory training for people who sell or serve alcohol;
- Restrictions on alcohol sales at community events;
- Social host laws that hold people accountable for providing alcohol to underage youth;
- Alcohol taxes; and
- Age restrictions for alcohol servers.

Media Advocacy uses the news to raise awareness of the problem on the public agenda. Media advocacy also can provide a vehicle for a highly visible community response, highlight project successes, demonstrate community support and promote policy change and/or consistent enforcement. The general purpose of media advocacy is to put the issue in front of the community and to raise the issue for discussion, debate and action.

Effective media advocacy utilizes quotes from authentic community members who genuinely understand and care about the issue. The focus of media advocacy is not public relations or to highlight the work of a prevention organization. Rather, media advocacy focuses on advancing change in the community through education and the pressure of community members who

are willing to take a stand to advance initiatives, such as policies that work.

Enforcement is a necessary component of Environmental Prevention because it ensures consistent application of new and/or existing policies. Many times, the level of enforcement in a community will be dictated by community norms. If a community views underage drinking as a rite of passage, law enforcement is less likely to strongly enforce underage drinking laws. Community advocates can support local, state, federal law enforcement agencies and the judicial system through strategic partnerships that will ensure policy enforcement.

Examples of strong collaboration with local enforcement agencies include:

- Law enforcement representatives work with community groups to provide guidance and support;
- Communities partner with law enforcement to deliver alcohol compliance trainings;
- Law enforcement shares data with community group who makes sure it is reflected in local news stories;
- Community groups promote community support for law enforcement; and
- Community groups work to make enforcement operations visible to the public as a deterrent.

—For more information about the Montana Community Change Project visit www.MTCCP.info.

Strategic Media Planning



According to 2007 *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* data, Montana students are at a greater risk than their peers in other states for riding with a driver who has been drinking alcohol and for engaging in episodic heavy drinking than their peers in other states. Changing one *student* at a time is not an effective solution: the social environment that accepts underage drinking as a rite of passage needs to change. One of the most effective tools to generate environmental change is the strategic use of mass media.

Media advocacy is a combination of advocacy and mass media that is strategically used to change the social environment or public policy. Instead of focusing on an individual behavioral change, media advocacy uses media to change the *environment* in which personal decisions are made. The results, permeating social change, are profoundly permanent and far reaching.

Successful Advocacy

Successful advocacy groups:

- Have a clearly stated policy goal;
- Identify the target audience with the power to make policy changes;
- Develop community support for the policy goal in advance;
- Prepare for tough questions by opponents; and
- Use the media to build support for policy change at the grass roots level.

Media advocacy is different than public relations. Media advocacy depends on a collaborative effort among community stakeholders who together develop a message rather than professional message development. The assumption is that those closest to the problem are the ones who are most able to fix it. Instead of giving people a message through media coverage for the community, media advocacy provides people with a voice and trains the community to use media skills. The end result is long-lasting environmental change created by the community, for the community.

No single media advocacy plan is available for general application. Every community that decides to develop media advocacy must make it part of an overall strategy based on community issues and available resources. Local newspapers, television, radio shows and other media are used to garner community support for change. Advocates build relationships with local media and a media contact list. Specific individuals speak on behalf of the organization to reduce the risk of inconsistent messages.

Some of the tools, including letters to the editor or submission of op-ed pieces to the local newspaper are relatively easy to accomplish. Other mechanisms include holding press conferences or putting out press releases. Successful media advocacy efforts answer the following questions:

- *What do you want to accomplish?*
- *Who is your target audience?*
- *What message do you need to convey to that audience?*
- *Who should deliver the message?*
- *What methods will you use to deliver it?*
- *How will you measure success?*

One of the problems Montana faces is the ready access many youth have to alcohol as well as a prevalent attitude that holds up underage drinking as normal. The majority of Montana youth who drink alcohol acquire it through someone they know. This problem needs to be addressed on a societal level to effect lasting change. Teaching our youth to *just say no* to underage drinking will *not* achieve the desired, long-term effect.

The goal? To reduce underage drinking and binge drinking in Montana by changing the environment that accepts and expects it. The primary targeted audiences include policy- and decision-makers, alcohol merchants, law enforcement officers, judges and other community leaders. Community advocacy groups must determine what kind of cooperation is needed from each group, who (or what) has influence with each group, and whether secondary audiences exist that are more accessible and who can influence the primary audiences. Advocacy groups must discover what the specified audiences think about underage drinking and tailor their messages.

Messages should be connected to commonly held values and delivered by those capable of influencing the target audiences. For example, legislators may respond better to a constituent concerned about child safety than a nationally-recognized prevention specialist from another state.

The advocacy group determines the type of media coverage that will get the attention needed, and decide how to time it. (An event on the front steps of the Capitol will probably not attract a legislator's attention on a Sunday afternoon.) Finally, advocacy groups must evaluate the work by reviewing whether or not what was done was consistent with the original intent.

Media advocacy is a powerful tool, and should be part of a larger, overall strategy that complements other approaches to creating social change. Policies are not changed overnight, but with careful planning and a strategic use of media, even the most deeply engrained policies can be changed.

The Power of Media Advocacy in Frontier Montana

—Nichol Scribner

Frontier communities face challenges in addressing issues such as binge drinking and drinking and driving. Low, often declining, populations and limited resources require prevention efforts to be creative and tactical in order to create sustainable change. Media advocacy, when used strategically, is a critical tool for prevention. Creating a healthy change in community norms, practices and behaviors requires identifying environmental strategies and seizing every opportunity to shape community perceptions. Media advocacy is one of the most effective tools for accomplishing this.

Effective media advocacy is not about a program, institution or public relations. It is the strategic, data-driven use of *news* to create change by advancing environmental, often policy-based, strategies in a way that results in more than new laws or additional enforcement. Media advocacy uses strategically planned and opportunistic media pieces as well as authentic local voices to drive a community's readiness to the point of acknowledging the issue. Media advocacy requires someone (or better, a team) to be in place on the ground in a community to research and identify environmental strategies that have the greatest potential to create sustainable change. The strategic use of news is then used to transform a community's outrage or concern into the actions that will advance these strategies.

Wibaux County is a frontier community in Eastern Montana. It is strong in beliefs, customs and independence. The community has a strong desire to flourish and provide better lives for future generations. Since 1911, the motto, "*Wibaux County will do her part, if you do yours,*" has kept people working together to create a prosperous environment. Even so, many issues work against community prosperity. Two examples are the social acceptance of binge drinking and of drinking and driving. This long-standing acceptance has made it difficult for prevention efforts to take hold. Many community members expect underage drinking and binge drinking by youth

because it has gone on for generations and remains something youth and adults engage in. Struggles within the community regarding the enforcement of laws and school policies designed to address these behaviors keep Wibaux divided. Drinking after a ballgame, dance or graduation has historically been ignored and accepted by adults. The practice of giving rides home and lenient consequences culturally engrain the behavior across generations.

Over the last year in Wibaux County, a prevention specialist has worked with the community to gather data, interview key community members, form a strategic team, develop work plans and identify environmental strategies critical to changing the cultural acceptance of underage and binge drinking and drinking and driving. The team is made up of formal and informal community leaders and prevention professionals. It has developed a strategic media advocacy plan and—as opportunities arise—is ready and able to use the media in the form of such devices as advisories, news releases, opinion editorials and letters to the editor. As a result of this media, a community dialogue is taking place and creating awareness of the scope and magnitude of problems associated with alcohol in Wibaux County and throughout Montana.

This process is continually changing as the community begins to take ownership of the problems. The change is not comfortable and does not always create a feel-good atmosphere. However, the opportunity to create sustainable community change to improve health and safety in frontier Montana is worth any discomfort along the way.

—Nichol Scribner, MBA, is the Regional Project Coordinator for the Eastern Montana Community Change Project, District II Alcohol and Drug Program in Glendive. She can be reached at 406.377.6950 or nrscribner@hotmail.com.

Deconstructing Media

One of the most important media literacy skills is deconstruction—closely examining and "taking apart" media messages to understand how they work.

Deconstructing a media message can help us understand who created it and who is intended to receive it. It can reveal how the media maker put together the message using words, images, sounds, design and other elements. It can expose the point of view of media makers, their values and their biases. It can also uncover hidden meanings—intended or unintended.

There is not any one way to deconstruct a media message—each of us interprets media differently, based on our own knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and values. But following are questions we can all ask.

Deconstruction Questions:

1. Whose message is this? Who created it? Why?
2. Who is the target audience? What are their ages, ethnicities, professions, interests? What words, images or sounds suggest this?
3. What is the text of the message? (What do we actually see and/or hear?)
4. What is the subtext (hidden or unstated meaning) of the message?
5. What tools of persuasion (e.g., humor, flattery, repetition, fear) are used?
6. What part of the story is not being told?

Media Literacy

—Kris Minard, Youth Connections Member

Every day we are bombarded with messages from different places: newspapers, television, radio, movies, magazines, billboards, the internet and of course our mail. It's important for each of us to properly analyze the meaning behind the messages before we allow them to take up space in our already over stimulated brains.

Have you ever seen a beer ad that depicts an older, overweight, bald and ugly man holding a beer while lying on the couch wielding his television remote control in his other hand? It's unlikely. Most

male beer drinkers in television ads are young, handsome and svelte, perhaps engaged in a beach volleyball game with some gorgeous, young, physically fit, bikini-clad women.

Have you ever seen a smokeless tobacco ad in a magazine that implies that smokeless tobacco use will improve your social and romantic life and that chewing is a safer and less addictive alternative to smoking? Of course you have. What you probably weren't shown were the bulging cheeks, gunk stuck between the teeth . . . or the empty gums where there used to be teeth. References to oral cancer and nicotine addiction somehow don't make print.

Media literacy, the ability to critically consume and create media, is an essential skill in today's world. Media literacy education gives kids and adults greater freedom by empowering them to access, analyze, evaluate and produce media. Media literate youth and adults are better able to understand not only the surface content of media messages but the more important meanings hidden beneath the surface.

Often we think of being "literate" as knowing how to read and write, but these days we get most of our information through a variety of combinations of text, images and sounds—through television, computers and the internet. It's still important to be able to read and write, but we also need to understand how media influences our decisions every minute, every hour and every day. Media literacy—the ability to critically consume and create many kinds of media—is essential.

It's not only important to understand how media affects our day-to-day lives, it's important to be able to contribute to that media and be able to get the word out with "media that matters" to you or your organization. Every year *Youth Connections* helps to sponsor "M Gen Fest"—the imMEDIATE Generation Festival, which showcases media created by youth who have something important to say. Any one ages 5-18 is invited to submit media in audio, video or print format. All submissions are juried and prizes are awarded to select pieces. As is clear from their projects, the kids are learning.

The next time you sit down to watch a television show or a movie, think critically about the products you see and the messages you receive . . . not just in the ads, but in the actual show. Deconstruct it to gain a deeper understanding of why you're seeing what you're seeing. Then you can decide if it's worth space in your brain!

—Kris Minard is a Youth Connections Member.

Youth Connections is a Helena coalition that engages all sectors of our community to create opportunities for youth to thrive and succeed, and reduce substance abuse and other risky behaviors among youth.

Great Resources:

Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth—www.camyo.org

This center monitors the marketing practices of the alcohol industry to focus attention and action on industry practices that jeopardize the health and safety of America's youth.

Center for Media Awareness—www.media-awareness.ca

This website contains resources and lesson plans for making youth more media literate.

Just Think—www.justthink.org

This program and website teaches youth about healthy lifestyles in a world highly impacted by media culture.

Media Education Foundation—www.mediaed.org

The Media Education Foundation produces and distributes documentary films and other educational resources to inspire critical reflection on the social, political and cultural impact of American mass media.

medialiteracy.com—www.medialiteracy.com

A major gateway site with hundreds of links and resources. Introductory tours for teachers, health professionals, activists, and parents. Links to lesson plans, free downloadable fact sheets and more. Speakers Bureau with speakers, trainers and consultants in media literacy education.

New Mexico Media Literacy Project—www.nmmlp.org

Cultivating critical thinking and activism in our media culture to build healthy and just communities.

Tobacco.org—www.tobacco.org

One of the best sites for tobacco news and information. This site includes an excellent searchable database of tobacco ads.

Friendly Greeters and Drug Reduction

The Montana National Guard Counterdrug Drug Demand Reduction (DDR) Program has been providing volunteer greeters at Helena public schools for several years. Montana National Guardsmen who volunteer for the Greeter Program believe that starting out a youth's day with a warm hello and a friendly smile shows them that they are appreciated and valued.

The Drug Demand Reduction Team normally has at least five volunteers to greet the kids as they come through the doors. Greeters make a point to see as many students as possible by walking the hallways throughout the school as students prepare for the first class of the day. At the elementary schools, greeters spend time on the playground interacting with students.

When the bell rings, the DDR team makes sure that each entrance has a smiling face to greet the children as they enter the school to start their day.

"As DDR Instructors, it's great to be able to build a good rapport with students so that when we see them in the classroom for DDR presentations they are already familiar with us," said Master Sergeant Kathryn Gilding, Supervisor of the Montana DDR team.

DDR volunteers are also acting as adult role models by demonstrating respect and professionalism while remaining friendly and responsive to students. "We take the time to stop and talk to students who want to strike up a conversation and try hard to ensure each student feels special and recognized," said Gilding.

The Counterdrug Task Force is a national program funded by the National

Guard Bureau. Its mission is to support law enforcement and communities in their efforts to reduce the use of drugs within each state. DDR instructors support communities in their drug awareness, prevention and education efforts by providing helicopter fly-ins, drug awareness and prevention presentations, team building activities and curriculum classes upon request.

Participating Helena schools currently include Rossiter and Warren Elementary schools and C. R. Anderson and Helena Middle schools. The DDR team and volunteers are at each location once a month. If you are interested in having the MTNG-DDR team greet students at other Helena locations, contact the Montana Counterdrug office at 324-3176.

Family Communication in the Digital Age

Your child opens the door, throws her backpack on the floor, runs to the refrigerator for an after-school snack and plops in front of the computer. You ask, "So, how was your day?" She responds, "Fine." The conversation ends.

Have you ever had one of those conversations with your child? You sit there thinking, "Where do I go from here?"

School can be stressful as teenagers face new academic and social pressures. We also know that the main reason teenagers cite for trying drugs is to help them handle these school-related pressures. So how can you start a conversation with your child that might yield better results?

Surveys show that more than half of teenagers who text message with their parents think that it has improved their relationship, and 51 percent of parents who text with their teens agree that they communicate more often. Here are some tips that might help initiate your texting experience.

Try texting conversation starters:

- If you wanna get together and talk, pizza's on me.
- You stressing about school? Let's talk.
- Let me know how things go 2day.
- Just wanted 2 say hello. Hope ur having a gr8 day!
- I'm always here if you need to talk!

Of course, texting should never replace open, face-to-face communication with your child, but it can help parents open new lines of communication. In addition, it's a non-confrontational way to start conversations about sensitive topics like stress, curfews and risky behavior (including tobacco and alcohol use).

Gudluk! Next time you have one of those one-word conversations with your teenager that ends seconds after it began, try a different approach. Your teenager really *daz* want to talk to you, so if past attempts have been minimally successful, try texting!

A parent's guide to text talk

- *Shorten, abbreviate, condense.*
Drop vowels and replace words with numbers whenever possible to keep your message short.
- *Numbers count too: I love you = 143, information = 411, anyone = NE1*
- *Don't use all capital letters unless you're mad - it means you're yelling!*

Decoding Text

- 143: I love you
- 411: Information
- BCUZ: Because
- BTW: By the way
- CU L8R: See you later
- F2T: Free to talk
- H&K: Hugs and kisses
- GUDLUK: Good luck
- IDK: I don't know
- JK: Just kidding
- L8R: Later
- LOL: Laugh out loud
- NE1: Anyone
- NP: No problem
- THx: Thanks
- TTYL: Talk to you later
- YR: You're

PIRE Field Guides

The Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation (PIRE) has several important field guides for law enforcement.

— *Guide to Preventing and Dispersing Underage Drinking Parties (2005)*

— *Law Enforcement Guide to False Identification (2005)*

— *Strategies for Reducing Third-Party Transactions of Alcohol to Underage Youth (2004)*

— *Indian Country Law Enforcement and the Challenges of Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (2002)*

— *Success in Youth Alcohol Enforcement (2002)*

— *Finding Common Ground to Address Underage Drinking on Campus (2001)*

— *Networking for Success (2001)*

To download or for more information, visit PIRE's website at www.pire.org/topiclist2.asp?cms=67.

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Prevention Resource Center and the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

The Prevention Resource Center and the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services attempt to provide reasonable accommodations for any known disability that may interfere with a person participating in this service. Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided upon request. For more information, call AMDD at (406) 444-3964 or the Prevention Resource Center at (406) 444-3484.

Detering Underage Drinking

—Julie Fischer

One of the most effective law enforcement tools for reducing underage drinking is the compliance check. *Reducing Alcohol Sales to Underage Purchasers* is a handbook for conducting successful compliance checks prepared by the Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation PIRE for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Successful compliance checks achieve several objectives. They:

- Reduce commercial availability of alcohol to minors;
- Serve as a preventive measure;
- Remind retailers of their legal and social responsibilities in the sale of alcohol; and
- Promote voluntary compliance by the alcohol retailers.

Volunteers should be carefully selected and trained for their roles in compliance checks. Each should fill out a personal history form, and a current photograph should be taken every time the volunteer participates in a compliance check. Each volunteer is subject to driving and criminal checks, and an agreement of understanding outlining the relationship between the volunteer and the agency, a copy of the volunteer's driver's license or another form of ID, a parental permission form, and an injury waiver should be on file for each volunteer.

Because alcohol sales may be influenced by such factors as gender or appearance, agencies should recruit volunteers of both genders and different racial backgrounds. Volunteers should be under age 20 and representative of their peers. Male volunteers shouldn't have facial hair and females shouldn't wear heavy makeup or revealing clothing. Volunteers should be careful not to dress in anything that might be interpreted as gang colors. If possible, they should not be used in their own communities or in the neighborhoods where they live or shop.

A consistent training program and protocol will also reduce potential complaints based on bias. Volunteers should be coached with regard to what to say, how to

act and how to respond to questions during attempted alcohol purchases. For example, volunteers should answer truthfully if asked their age, to produce an ID or if the clerk asks for whom the alcohol is being purchased. Volunteers should not use words or behaviors to entice a clerk to sell alcohol, and if an acquaintance is on site, the volunteer should not attempt to purchase alcohol at all. Opportunities for practice should also be provided.

Although compliance checks can be conducted with one officer, they are often conducted in teams. One officer remains outside while a plainclothes officer enters an establishment prior to the arrival of the underage alcohol purchaser, to observe the transaction. If the clerk agrees to make the sale, the underage purchaser makes a simple purchase with small bills. If the transaction is completed, the underage purchaser leaves the store and the officer steps forward and writes a citation.

One frequently asked question is whether or not to issue a Notice to Appear immediately after the violation or later, at the end of the compliance check campaign. Alcohol retailers may telephone one another as soon as a compliance check has been made; the telephone tree may compromise subsequent investigations. When a Notice to Appear is written, it is advisable to send a copy of the citation, police report and corresponding statistical information to the Montana Department of Revenue (DOR), the agency responsible for monitoring alcohol establishments and liquor licenses.

Compliance checks should be a fair assessment of what takes place in alcohol sales establishments. When compliance investigations have been implemented in a community for an extended period of time, the amount of time and money law enforcement must invest in addressing underage drinking issues declines. Successful compliance checks are not determined by the number of citations written; success means catching the clerks doing the right thing all the time.

—Julie Fischer is a Program Specialist for the Montana Board of Crime Control. She can be reached at 406-444-2056 or JFischer2@mt.gov.

The Great Falls Police Department: *Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws*

—Steve Pre'tat

For the Fall 2007 *Alcohol and Tobacco Issue* of the *Prevention Connection*, I wrote an article about the Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws program here in Great Falls. This program deals with reducing underage drinking and DUIs in Great Falls and at Malmstrom Air Force Base. Here is an update.

The Great Falls Police Department, Cascade County DUI Task Force and Malmstrom Air Force Base have always had an exceptional working relationship. The base is so interwoven with the community that it is natural for the base leadership and security forces to work closely with the Great Falls Police Department and the Task Force. In early 2003, the City Police Department noted that DUI arrests and Minor in Possession of Alcohol (MIP-A) offenses were escalating on and off base. After a series of crimes that affected our community, the police department decided to expand the alcohol prevention program. Although the police department has had progressive alcohol prevention efforts in place since 1999, more training and intervention programs were seen as potential solutions to an escalating social issue.

In 2006, the Department of Justice announced a grant designed to help reduce alcohol-related incidents on Air Force bases. The police department, with officials from Malmstrom, submitted a proposal and were awarded the grant.

Rather than using a traditional marketing program, we decided to take a different approach in terms of how we conveyed our message and enforcement efforts. With this in mind, we utilized media outlets to our advantage. Every day, the Great Falls Police Department Media Officer meets with local television and newspaper reporters to go over criminal activities that occurred during the past 24 hours. These meetings have prompted a friendly relationship between the press and the police department. They also allow the police department to provide citizens with insight into our programs.

In our effort to find innovative ways to send the message, we shied away from

"in your face" billboards and confrontational marketing. Informative public service commercials produced locally sparked curiosity and humor, and subtly reminded people about responsible alcohol use. Marketing was part of the overall program.

Training remains the cornerstone of our efforts. The department provides at least six free, Department of Revenue Responsible Alcohol Server Trainings a year to the alcohol-serving community. These seminars emphasize the civil liabilities outlined in Montana's Dram Shop Law and remind sellers that they are the first line of defense in protecting themselves, their businesses and the citizens of Cascade County. Additionally, we work with the Montana State Crime Lab and the Montana Highway Patrol to provide free law enforcement training on Standardized Field Sobriety Testing and the Intoxilyzer 8000.

Enforcement efforts target areas where minors congregate. Plain-clothes officers completed almost 1,000 bar, restaurant, casino and convenience store walk-throughs in 2008 alone. These walk-throughs were centered around preventing over-sales of alcohol and catching minors consuming in, or around, these areas. Finally, stepped-up DUI patrols concentrated on primary and secondary roadways.

We are in Year Three of this program and have seen promising reductions in DUIs and MIP-A arrests, on and off base. Community perceptions appear to be changing, as demonstrated by local and city support of a social host ordinance currently in draft stages, as well as by the reduction in arrests. Interestingly, a national report recently released by the National Institute on Drug Abuse indicates a 40 percent drop in alcohol by youth, primarily because it's becoming less available from liquor vendors. We purposely try not to make this a numbers game and hope that continued efforts will change community values and help us reduce all alcohol-related crimes.

—Master Patrol Officer Steve Pre'tat works for the Great Falls Police Department #190 and serves as the Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) Community Coordinator. He can be reached at spretat@greatfallsmt.net.

Responsible Alcohol Sales and Service Training

The Department of Revenue is recruiting volunteer trainers to help implement the Let's Control It responsible alcohol sales and service training program across the state. If you have an interest in helping curb underage access to alcohol and over-intoxication, then we are looking for you to help train liquor license holders and their employees.

"To help accomplish this goal, we will be holding several free train-the-trainer sessions across the state," said Lisa Scates, education specialist for the Liquor Control Division. Scates added, "The Department of Revenue strives to ensure that liquor licensees have the knowledge and skills they need to stay in compliance with the law by providing responsible alcohol sales and service training to liquor establishments."

Train-the-trainer sessions are planned in several communities throughout the state. If you are interested, call Lisa Scates at (406) 444-4307 or e-mail LiScates@mt.gov

Compliance Checks

—Vernon R. Brown



Compliance checks are one of the most effective means of curbing underage alcohol and tobacco purchases. A frequent, consistent program of enhanced enforcement in addition to community programs and mandatory Responsible Alcohol Sales and Service (RASS) classes is most effective in limiting underage alcohol purchases.¹

Thirty-five percent of youth who smoke and drink get their alcohol and tobacco from retailers. Most purchases happen because an employee failed to check the minor's identification. Regular compliance checks can significantly reduce the occurrence of these violations, not only through increased training, but through the expectation of being observed by authorities.

During a compliance check, a minor enters a business under the auspices of a legitimate regulatory agency (e.g., a DUI task force, local law enforcement or the Department of Public Health and Human

Services Addictive and Mental Disorders Division) and attempts to purchase alcohol or tobacco. The methods and outcomes of the compliance checks vary depending on the agency conducting the check and the substance being purchased.

Montana currently has no regular statewide program for alcohol compliance checks, so attention should be given to the record and effectiveness of the Synar Tobacco Checks. Montana's compliance rate for tobacco sales to minors was a dismal 62 percent in 1998, placing us as the 6th worst in the nation. From 1999 to 2002, our performance increased to an average of 77 percent. In 2003, however, compliance rates started to shoot up and since 2007, Montana's overall compliance rate has exceeded 95 percent. There are many factors that work together to generate a success story like this one, but one of the most important factors has been a program called *Reward and Reminder*. This program of additional survey visits started in 2002 and has been largely responsible for the increase in retailer awareness and their refusal to sell tobacco to minors.

Reward and Reminder functions like a compliance check, but because the minor never consummates the sale of the tobacco item, no violation has taken place and thus there is no fine or administrative sanction. If it appears that the clerk *would* have been willing to make the sale, s/he is given a card reminding him/her of Montana's youth access to tobacco laws. If s/he has refused to sell tobacco to the minor, then s/he receives a *thank you* and a different card allowing him/her to enter a drawing for a gift certificate. *Reward and Reminder* is an on-the-spot compliance training tool for retailers. Nearly every retailer in Montana receives between one and three survey visits each year. Combined with actual tobacco inspections, that means about 5,200 tobacco compliance checks per year.

The increased presence of compliance checks has raised clerks' expectation of being inspected. Educational programs such as the RASS trainings, newsletters, mailings and media events increase this perception. This translates to a higher probability that they will ask for identification and refuse sales to minors.

There are many reasons why authorities hesitate to conduct alcohol enforcement checks, including the possibility of damaging personal relationships, and the negative financial effects of fines or the suspension or revocation of an alcohol or tobacco license. As valid as these concerns may be, protecting the health and welfare of minors and of the community takes precedence. Studies of the long- and short-term effects of alcohol on the development of the adolescent brain must be considered in conjunction with morbidity statistics of youth driving under the influence of alcohol. Ultimately, this makes reducing youth access to age-controlled substances our primary concern.

Compliance checks have a positive aspect. The thank you card from *Reward and Reminder* and State Certificates from Synar inspections tobacco reinforces the desire to do the right thing. Some Montana businesses have created their own recognition programs as an incentive for employees who pass alcohol or tobacco compliance checks. Efforts like these are a positive note for employees . . . and happy employees do a better job of enforcing the law, and the community is better protected.

Compliance checks, done regularly and often, have turned the youth access to tobacco story around here in Montana. A regular system of alcohol compliance checks, where businesses are inspected and educated on a regular basis, will have the same positive effect on denying illicit alcohol sales to minors. This is a change that Montana needs to embrace statewide at the soonest possible point.

—Vernon R. Brown is the Hill County Site Coordinator for the Havre HELP Committee, and the Compliance Program Coordinator. He can be reached at 406.265.6206 x312 or vernb@bgchi-line.com.

Source Cited:

Guide to Community Preventive Services. Reducing excessive alcohol use: enhanced enforcement of laws prohibiting sales to minors. www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/lawsprohibitionsales.html. Last updated: 02/10/2009

Combined Synar & State Tobacco Compliance Checks:

- 1999: 75% compliance
- 2000: 78% compliance
- 2001: 77% compliance
- 2002: 78% (1st year of *Reward and Reminder*)
- 2003: 90% compliance
- 2004: 86% compliance
- 2005: 91% compliance
- 2006: 91% compliance
- 2007: 95.9% compliance
- 2008: 95.3% compliance

Strengthening Montana

—Governor Brian Schweitzer

On March 25, 2009, I signed Senate Bill 438 into law to treat energy drinks (containing 0.5 percent alcohol or more and stimulants) as hard alcohol for sales purposes. This takes them out of grocery and convenience stores, where they are often all too accessible to kids. Sponsored by Senator Carol Juneau, this initiative came up from the grassroots . . . from parents, families and health professionals, many of whom came from the Senator's district which includes the Blackfeet Nation.

With names like Rockstar, Monster Energy and Full Throttle, these energy drinks were a genuine recipe for disaster: cheaper, tastier, and easier to get because

of the way they were labeled and marketed. It's often hard to distinguish between the energy drinks with and without alcohol. They look so much like the nonalcoholic energy drinks so popular among teens and young adults that customers and clerks alike could be confused about what they were buying...or selling. One of the scariest things about these drinks is that the alcohol by volume is often a lot higher than you'll find in beer. The fact that the products contain alcohol at all is only included in the fine print of the labels. Many of these drinks also contain high levels of sugar, flavoring, about as much caffeine as a venti cup of Starbucks, along with additives like ginseng that rev up the central nervous system. They have been sold at grocery and convenience stores, sometimes within inches of non-alcoholic drinks designed for

kids. They're usually cheaper by nearly a dollar a drink and, because of the high sugar content, taste better to kids.

My wife, Nancy, and I have supported state, federal and community efforts to reduce and prevent underage drinking for many years. Nancy works with the Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free, an organization of current and former First Spouses that works as a catalyst for change and to prevent kids between the ages of 8 and 15 from using alcohol. We believe that stopping underage drinking needs to be a unified effort at all levels.

My Administration has worked hard to create safe communities and to provide Montana's youth with the support they need to make good choices. I'm proud of my role in signing Senate Bill 438. It just got harder to sell alcohol labeled as Sparks, Tilt, Joose, Cocaine and Monster Assault to Montana's kids.

Just Ask Anna

—Anna Whiting-Sorrell

S*"It's better to build a wall to prevent a car carrying a family from going over a cliff than to hire more ambulance drivers." —Jerry Moe*

Substance abuse, domestic violence and oppression harm more than our bodies—they kill our souls. The harm done by substance abuse in Montana's communities is incalculable. Fortunately, science is catching up and we can do more than react. We can act. That's why prevention is my passion.

I have spent much of my career on programs that deal with the aftermath of addiction . . . as well as with issues related to foster care, child protection . . . substance abuse treatment and prevention. I know what happens when we just "hire more ambulance drivers." The family members who go over the cliff may never fully recover, and we, as a Montana community, often spend decades trying to stabilize the survivors. The results are legion and they are expensive, running the gamut from multi-generational crisis poverty to multi-generational addiction, and from ongoing trauma to school drop-out, teen pregnancy, violence and homelessness.

I was deeply honored when Governor Schweitzer asked me to serve as the

Director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services, but I'm also very excited about possibilities, possibilities that include weaving prevention through the vast spectrum of programs and services that we can offer families. I am tremendously excited about the idea of throwing open windows and doors, to becoming more available to the readers of the *Prevention Connection*, and to the Montanans who need the services only DPHHS can provide.

That's why I will be writing a column for each issue of this newsletter. What I write about will be up to you, the readers. I want to answer your questions, tell you what you need or want to know about DPHHS and about the programs and agencies that exist under our umbrella. If I don't know the answer, I will find it. The more open and transparent we can be, the better we can serve the Montana community. I believe that knowledge is power, and that through knowledge and information, we can build the walls that will protect families from driving over cliffs.

Help me. Let me know what is on your mind. We have set up a link to a Survey Monkey tool (Just Ask Anna) on the www.DPHHS.mt.gov website or you can e-mail your questions to Sherri Downing, Editor of the *Prevention Connection* (DowningSL@bresnan.net), and she'll convey them to me.

We are also open to names for my column, so there will be a spot on the survey where you can make suggestions for that, as well. I want to be open to you, and responsive to you, because I believe that DPHHS must be the one place where people can go to find the bridges they need, the bridges that will carry them from need to self-sufficiency.

—Editor's note: Anna Whiting-Sorrell is the Director of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. She is a former health systems planner and program analyst, and has extensive experience managing programs focused on substance abuse and family support.

The Last Word

—Joan Cassidy



his issue of the *Prevention Connection* was designed to serve as an Alcohol Prevention Toolkit. It focuses on strategies that will ultimately change global thinking and community policy, and gives information about deciphering the marketing and messages coming in from all angles, all of the time.

Alcohol-sponsored advertising is ubiquitous and it's everywhere. On-line, at sporting events, at community celebrations, on television, in magazines . . . and in many places we don't even stop to think about. Our perceptions are shaped by what we believe, what we see and what we hear. And alcohol use and abuse are so thoroughly institutionalized that many of us have never stopped to question the veracity of some of our most common beliefs: *that alcohol should be part of every celebration or social event . . . that drinking is something*

youth will engage no matter what . . . that most Montanans drink on a regular basis. Unfortunately, social policy (written and unwritten) often arises from our engrained perceptions.

With regard to alcohol, the two—perception and reality—are often radically and dangerously different. The reality is that alcohol has caused such serious harm to our youth, families and communities that it can accurately be labeled a public health issue.

Environmental prevention tools are used to help set the record straight. Environmental prevention theory holds out three key components: community norms, availability and local regulations. Community norms and local regulations begin to change when communities receive accurate information that contradicts their perceptions. For example, according to the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, in 2007 just 5.4 percent of adult Montanans engaged in heavy drinking (defined as adult men having more than two drinks per day and adult women having more than one), and 43.6 percent had not had any alcohol at all within the past 30 days.

Despite the fact that most of us don't drink frequently or heavily, the costs of alcohol consumption are incalculable. According to Montana Department of Transportation data, alcohol-related fatal crashes have been between 45 and 50 percent of all fatal crashes in the last several years. And Montana has had the highest fatality rate per vehicle miles traveled during three of the last four years.

Environmental strategies focus on changing the aspects of our social milieu that contribute to the use of alcohol and other drugs. These strategies are designed to decrease the consequences of substance abuse by limiting youth access and by changing the social norms that accept alcohol use and abuse as an immutable fact of life. As you see in this issue, we are making real progress, one social host ordinance, one media literacy campaign, one compliance monitoring at a time. It's a great start.

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